

THE 2
GENERAL DOCTRINE
OF
TOLERATION
APPLIED TO THE
PARTICULAR CASE
OF
FREE COMMUNION.

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SO much, and so much to the purpose, has been published on the doctrine of church-fellowship, that nothing but the repeated solicitations of friends, who would take no denial, could have induced me to add to the number of such publications. I do not pretend to say any thing new on the subject, I have only endeavoured to state the case, and arrange the arguments, leaving every reader to form his own judgment.



INTRODUCTION.

TH E most diligent and upright disciples of Jesus Christ have always entertained, and do yet entertain various sentiments concerning articles of faith and modes of divine worship, and there are but *two* ways of acting among christians in this case.

The first, which the far greater part profess to pursue, is that of obtaining, some way or other, unity of faith, and *uniformity* of practice. In the papal corporation, and in some reformed communities, riches and power contend with weakness and want to silence scruples, and to force a real or professed uniformity. In some of our nonconformist churches, learning, argument and beneficence are employed to produce the same effect. At length, however, unquestionable facts prove, that, how upright soever the attempt may be, the end is unattainable. The mind of man, uncontrolled in its operations, and for ever diversifying its modes of thinking, refuses to submit to restraint, and it is the virtue of such a mind to avow its refusal.

If uniformity cannot be obtained, say the other, and the smaller part of christians, there remains only one thing for us to do; we must so constitute our churches as to *allow* variety of sentiment and practice, and by so doing acknowledge the force

of nature for the voice of God. Let us put, say they, *toleration* in the place of uniformity, this can never be produced: but that lies within the reach of every society.

The English nonconformists have, of all mankind, best understood, and most practised christian liberty: but there have arisen in many of their churches, as may naturally be supposed of men zealous for their religious principles, doubts and debates concerning the *extent* of that toleration, which christian liberty implies, but which, however, ought not to run into licentiousness, as it would if it went so far as to hazard the purity of gospel worship and order.

Under this consideration comes the well known controversy among our Baptist congregations, whether churches consisting of members all baptized by immersion on a profession of faith and repentance, ought to admit into their fellowship such persons as profess faith and repentance, and desire communion with them, but refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they account they have been rightly baptized by sprinkling in their infancy. To this question, and to this only, we shall confine our attention.

A brief history of this controversy.

This dispute, it should seem, began in the reign of Charles I. Some time about the year 1633, a member of that congregational church in London, of which Mr. Lathorp was pastor, doubting the validity of that baptism, which Mr. Lathorp had administered to his child, carried the child to the parish priest to be rebaptized. This affair came before the brethren at a church meeting, and of consequence brought on an inquiry first concerning the validity of lay baptism, and next concerning

cerning the validity of infant baptism itself. In the end, several members declared against infant baptism, and desired liberty to depart, and to form a distinct congregation in such order as was most agreeable to their own sentiments. To this peaceable proposal the church agreed, and, the new church being formed, Mr. Spilsbury was appointed pastor of it.

In 1634 Mr. Lathorp, with about thirty of his members, fled into New England from the persecution of the prelates. After his departure his church divided into three parts, Mr. Canne was minister of one, Mr. Barebone of another, and Mr. Jessey of the third. These frequent divisions did not proceed, as their adversaries affirmed, from a factious spirit, much less from the nature and constitution of our churches, but partly from the great increase of their members, and partly from the danger of being discovered by their persecutors, when large societies met.

In 1638 Mr. Kiffin, and several other members of Mr. Jessey's church, having become baptists, were dismissed from thence to the church under the care of Mr. Spilsbury. In Mr. Spilsbury's church persons were allowed to preach, who had not been baptized by immersion. Mr. Kiffin, who was himself a preacher, objected against this, and at length removed his communion to the church at Devonshire-square, where he was afterward settled pastor. A transition from the right of unbaptized persons to preach, to the right of the same persons to communion, was natural, and Mr. Kiffin soon published a piece entitled *A sober discourse of right to church communion*, in which he endeavoured to prove, that no unbaptized persons may be regularly admitted to the Lord's supper. I take this to be the first piece published professedly on this subject.

Mr. Jeffey continued to practise infant baptism till 1645, when he renounced that opinion, and was baptized by immersion by Mr. Hanserd Knollys, who had been the same year ordained pastor of a baptist church assembling in great St Helen's.

Mr. Jeffey did not quit his former charge on being baptized, but continued pastor of the same church till his death, which happened in Sept. 1663. His situation naturally led him to study the point of *right* to church fellowship, and, judging mixt communion lawful, he wrote a small piece in defence of it. It is a dissertation, perhaps a sermon, on Rom. xiv. 1. *Such as are weak in the faith receive ye.* It does not appear, that this piece was printed during the life of Mr. Jeffey. It is not in any list of his works, which I have seen. The person, who afterward published it, says " I met with it *providentially*. . . . it was sent many years since to *some* of the baptists. . . it will be *attested* to be Mr. Jeffey's, if need shall require." This piece, then, seems to have gone about in manuscript.

In 1672 Mr. Bunyan, then in prison, published his *confession of faith*, and in it pleaded warmly for mixt communion. In answer to this, Messieurs Kiffin and Paul published a piece entitled *Some serious reflections on that part of Mr. Bunyan's confession of faith touching church communion with unbaptized believers.* These gentlemen treated John very cavalierly. Your *conclusion*, say they, *is devilish topfull of ignorance and prejudice*: but this we forgive them, for John was a tinker without dish or spoon, and at best but a country teacher, and the Rev. Mr. William Kiffin was a London minister and worth forty thousand pounds.

The next year, Mr. Bunyan published an answer entitled *Differences in judgement about water baptism no bar to communion*, and to this he sub-joined

joined the abovementioned piece of Mr. Jeffrey's, to satisfy the call of his opponents, who had required him to produce the testimony of some author. To this piece of Mr. Bunyan's Messieurs Danvers and Paul replied, and John answered them in 1674 in about two sheets in twelves entitled *Peaceable principles and true*. In all these he continued uniform in his sentiments, declaring he would abide by his faith and practice till *the moss should grow upon his eyebrows*. I mention this, because the editors of his works in folio have inserted a discourse entitled *An exhortation to peace and unity*, in which it is declared that baptism is essential to church communion: but, it is evident, Bunyan never wrote this piece. 1. The *doctrine* is not his, and the above article and some others are diametrically opposite to his avowed principles. 2. The *style* is not his, as a comparison between this and his genuine works will clearly demonstrate. I venture to affirm, Bunyan could not write in such a style, might he have been freed from imprisonment for doing so. 3. The *quotations* are none of his. How could he quote Plutarch, Camden's Britannia, Greek and Roman history, books he never saw, nor could have read had he seen them? 4. The writer of this discourse talks *Latin* too, and concludes with *Vale*. I recollect only one scrap of Latin in John's works, and he has put opposite to that in the margin, *the Latin I borrow*. 5. There is *no mention* of this piece in that list of his works, which was published by that great admirer of him Mr. Charles Doe, who knew him personally, and who bought some manuscripts of his son after his decease, and published them, particularly *The heavenly footman*, and along with it a correct list of all his genuine works, with dates, sizes, &c. This therefore is one of the many spurious pieces ascribed to Bunyan by some poverty-

poverty-struck scribblers, who stole his golden name to give currency to their own base coin.

Since Mr. Bunyan's time the controversy has sometimes subsided, and at other times risen into considerable warmth. The celebrated Dr. James Foster warmly pleaded the cause of mixt fellowship in a sermon, afterward printed, entitled *Catholic communion*, which gave occasion to a dispute, that lasted eight or ten years, from about 1750 to 1760. The Rev. Mr. Charles Bulkley and others supported the Dr's side of the question, and the Rev. Grantham Killingworth and others maintained the contrary opinion.

In 1772 the question was started again, and the doctrine of mixt communion was affirmed by the Rev. Messieurs Turner of Abingdon, Ryland of Northampton, and Brown of Kettering, and denied by the Rev. Messieurs Turner of Birmingham, Booth of London, Buttfield of Thorn, and several more, who took fictitious names, without any reason I think, for their real names do honour to every cause, to which they think proper to affix them.

I have carefully read all the pieces, and, I think, though different degrees of esteem are due to different writers, yet some respect is due to them all. For my part, however backward I may be to controvert such points, I confess, I am always edified by reading the controversies. I admire the constitution of our churches, because it admits of free debate. Happy community! that can produce a dispute of one hundred and fifty years unstained with the blood, and unsullied with the fines, the imprisonments and the civil inconveniences of the disputants. As to a few coarse names, rough compliments, foreign suppositions, and acrimonious exclamations, they are only the harmless squeakings of men in a passion caught and pinched in a sort of logical trap. We shall waive
all

all these, and attend to *what* has been said, and not to the *manner* in which it was spoken.

C A S E S T A T E D.

This whole debate, I should suppose, may be divided into a case of *fact* and a case of *right*.

C A S E o f F A C T.

On the one hand, it is matter of fact, that many sincere disciples of Christ declare, that, having renounced all authority except that of the holy scriptures to decide in all matters of faith and practice, and having searched the scriptures with all the diligence and rectitude, of which they are capable, they think infant baptism of divine appointment, and rightly performed by sprinkling water on the face.

It is matter of fact, that many baptist churches do conscientiously admit such persons into their fellowship.

It is also fact, that these churches affirm, and they are best capable of giving evidence in this case, that no inconvenience has arisen to them from the mixture of their communion. The writer of this has been a member of such a church more than twenty years, but has never heard of the least disadvantage arising to the community from it, and he has received a like attestation from the ministers of several other mixt churches.

Further, it is a fact, that these members perform all the duties of church fellowship, glorify God in their lives and conversations, and support the character of christians as honourably as the baptist brethren do.

Moreover, it is a matter of fact, that some churches have been mixt from before the time of the civil war in the reign of Charles, I. when the baptists first made their publick appearance in England.

In fine, it is an undeniable fact, that, during the time of the great papal apostacy, while churches were congregated in private for fear of prelatical persecution, believers, who held infant baptism, and believers, who disowned it, were united in the same community, as ancient manuscripts and authentick records abundantly prove.

On the other hand, it is certain, that, from the first publick appearance of baptist churches in England, many have refused, and to this day continue to refuse to admit into their fellowship all manner of persons, however qualified in other respects, who have not been baptized by immersion on their own profession of faith and repentance.

It is equally true, that all these baptists allow the piety and virtue of unbaptized believers, account them members of the mystical body of Christ, and some of them possessors of knowledge and piety far superior to their own, and they hold themselves bound to discharge every kind office to them, except this one of admitting them to church fellowship.

It is a fact, that these churches do not believe baptism a saving ordinance, nor do they think it a test of true religion, nor do they hold that unbaptized believers ought not to be tolerated in a state, nor do they deny any intelligent being the right of private judgment, they only refuse to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches.

It is also a clear fact, that these baptists affirm, their refusal does not proceed from wilful ignorance, obstinacy, spirit of party, bigotry, or any other illiberal disposition: but from a fear of offending God by acting without a sufficient warrant from his written word, the rule of all religious conduct. Their testimony ought to be admitted, because they are the best judges of their own motives,

tives, because the general conduct of their lives confirms their testimony, and because (of some of them it must be allowed) they extend candour and compliments and polite professions of liberality of sentiment far, very far indeed, beyond what some of their brethren, who hold free communion, pretend to do.

Moreover, it is a fact unquestionable, that, as some independent churches practising free communion have admitted so many baptist members, that the latter have in time formed a great majority, who have chosen a baptist minister, through whose influence the church has become a baptist church; so, on the contrary, some baptist churches holding free communion have admitted so many unbaptized members, that the churches have in time chosen ministers, who held infant-baptism, and lost the ordinance of baptism by immersion.

Lastly, it is matter of fact, that the primitive churches, those in Greece, that at Rome, and all others, were originally constituted baptist churches, and that they lost the ordinance of baptism, along with the doctrines of the gospel, and the very nature and essence of christian churches, not by practising a wise toleration towards men of allowed piety, but by setting up certain external qualifications of church members, which in time became tests of orthodoxy, to which wicked men could and did conform, under pretence of authority from Christ to establish uniformity.

All these are *facts*, but none of these constitute *christian law*, and, if we would ascertain what is right, we must distinguish what *is* from what *ought to be*.

C A S E O F R I G H T .

The question before us is RIGHT to church fellowship, and our inquiry must necessarily be, what makes it just and right for churches to admit of mixed communion. The proper answer to this inquiry, on the allowed principles of all the disputants, is, THE REVEALED WILL OF JESUS CHRIST, the original projector of church fellowship, and the sole legislator in all the assemblies of his saints.

In strict adherence to this truly protestant ground of action, and in order to try out the question as fairly and clearly as we can, we will ascertain *the judge* of the controversy, and *the law* of the case, and in order to this we will turn the subject on both sides, and first shew negatively what does *not* make the law of the case, and then positively what *does*.

First, then, Nothing can be determined concerning the right in question from the *universal consent*, real or pretended, of *men out of our own community*. We divide these into *four* classes, and, although we have all due regard for them, yet we reject each apart, and all together, as judges pronouncing law in this case.

First, the *fathers* are incompetent, for, if any thing in their writings look like the case before us, it is the case of heretical baptism: but the amount of all our inquiries on this article would be, that one says yea, and another says nay, and both refer us to Jesus Christ, and so we leave off where we began.

Secondly, *Roman Catholics*, both in council and out of it, are incompetent, for their proper work, for which they are hired and retained, is not investigation of truth, much less determining protestant

protestant controversies: but submission to infallible papal authority. A catholick priest does not deserve to be made a Lord Prelate till he has well and thoroughly learnt, that his business is not to examine the load, but to keep the cart on wheels.

Thirdly, *polemical divines, and pious ones too, in established reformed churches*, utter no law here. The case in hand never came, never could come seriously before them, and, if it had, having previously resigned the right of judging for themselves by subscribing a religious test, they could not prudently, or even uprightly, give an opinion in direct contradiction to it. All baptists judge, that these divines are mistaken in every part of baptism, in the nature, the subject, the mode, and the end of it, and this is one reason of their dissent from them; they cannot therefore consistently allow their opinions on baptism and church government the force of law.

Lastly, *Learned criticks*, foreign or domestick, have no occasion to interfere in this case, nor can they be offended at our affirming, that the christian church stands in no need of their assistance in this point now before them, for this plain reason, it is not a learned question. It would be a great misfortune to a company of plain homely christians in church fellowship, if any case pertaining to life and godliness must cost fifteen hundred pounds worth of Latin and Greek to make evident and clear.

Should all these four classes of writers agree to make baptism necessary to salvation, necessary to a civil office, necessary to receiving the Lord's supper, necessary to the honour of being enrolled in the parish register while we live, and necessary to that of putrifying among our neighbours after

we are dead, and should any baptist so far forget himself as to urge this universal consent as argument why *we* should not admit the persons in question to the Lord's table, I will venture to say, it would be an unfair appeal to the sheepishness of some, and the modesty of others, in a case of conscience, where only scripture is law, and Christ alone is judge.

Secondly, nothing can be argued for or against this right from the *great names in our own churches* employed in this controversy. Gale and Foster, Bunyan and Kiffin, along with all the moderns, before whom the case actually came, and who had personal interest in deciding it, are respectable as counsel pleading on different sides of the question, and we calmly attend to what they say : but none of their opinions constitute the *law* of the case.

Thirdly, nothing can be determined for it from *general notions* of benevolence and usefulness, nor against it from zealous and upright intentions of preserving purity of doctrine and order, for in a case that comes under written revealed law, as the constitution of christian churches evidently does, general dispositions must be regulated by particular directions.

Fourthly, neither can one side infer the right in question from *any particular case* mentioned in the New Testament, nor can the other support their plea against it by the silence of the New Testament, for the truth is, infant baptism was not then known, and consequently the case of admitting to fellowship persons baptized in infancy does not occur there.

Fifthly, *no accidental circumstances* can determine this matter. There have fallen into this controversy, as into all others, a collection of what I
call

call accidental circumstances, and which have been argued upon, and have led off the attention of the inquirer from the case in hand.

For example. 1. *Cases* have been supposed and urged, as that of admitting Jesuits, and Quakers, and others: but these suppositions prove nothing. Lawyers say truly, there is nothing so hard to find as a case in point. These cases are not in point, for they never did happen, they never can happen, and were they to happen they would not be *this* case, and they must be investigated on other principles, and rejected for other reasons. Neither supposed cases urged on one side, nor real cases allowed on the other, constitute the law of this case.

2. *The motives, tempers and views* of the disputants decide nothing. A sour surly man may growl and grumble truth, a well bred man may warble melodious nonsense, a sincere disputant may be a very silly fellow, and a man right in his principles may be wrong in his motives of defending them.

3. *Mistakes and self contradictions* in writers yield no argument against the general truth, which they are defending. If upright men sometimes in the heat of controversy forget themselves, we should do worse than they, were we to magnify their frailty into a crime, and their crime into a rule of action. On the other hand, an argument may be uniform, and free from self-contradiction, and yet it may not hit the case.

4. *Frightful consequences*, affixed by one writer to the arguments of another, ought not to be urged as decisive reasoning constituting the law of a case.

In short, the right or wrong of this case is determinable only by the written revealed will of
God,

God; a test of truth, which all the parties will allow.

Having thus cleared the court of a bustling noisy crowd, that do no good because they give no evidence, and do a deal of harm because they perplex the question by throwing in a quantity of foreign matter, let us proceed to investigate what is the law of *Christ* in this case.

We affirm, then, that it is JUST and RIGHT and agreeable to the revealed will of Christ, that Baptist churches should admit into their fellowship such persons as desire admission on profession of faith and repentance: although they refuse to be baptized by immersion, because they sincerely believe they have been rightly baptized by sprinkling in their infancy.

By way of explanation, I beg leave to distinguish what our divines call the *esse*, or the *being* of a church, from the *melius esse*, or *best being* of one; for, although I affirm such a mixt church to be a rightly constituted church, yet I do not say, its constitution is so perfect as that of the primitive churches. A church that tolerates is a good church: but a church that has no errors to tolerate is a better. We do not therefore blame those churches, which were never required to admit unbaptized believers, for maintaining strict communion, we only say, where the requisition is made a compliance with it is just and right.

In support of this sentiment we beg leave to offer *two sorts* of arguments, the first taken from those *general principles of analogy*, on which, the scriptures declare, the christian church is founded; and the second from the *express laws of Jesus Christ* recorded in scripture for the regulation of our conduct.

God is an intelligent being. An intelligent
being

being exercises his intelligence when he constructs any exterior work, and the work will resemble the intelligence of its maker. A wise and beneficent being will naturally and necessarily form a work full of beneficence and wisdom. Should a perfect being create a world, it would be a world expressive of his invisible perfections, should he form a church in this world, it would be a church constituted on similar principles, and, if skill and compassion were excellencies of his nature, compassion and skill might be expected in the construction of his church. There would be an analogy, or resemblance, between the ties of nature and the social bonds of grace.

We find on reading the new testament, that God is the author of christianity, the creator of the christian church, that he hath displayed the eminence of his perfections in the construction of it, and that he hath inviolably preserved an analogy between the natural and preternatural worlds. This is the true ground of all the parables, in which Christ taught his heavenly doctrine, and of all the discourses, by which he displayed the conduct of God to men under resemblances of a father and his sons, a shepherd and his flock, a husbandman and his lands, and so on. For the same reasons, we are expressly told of the abounding, or abundance of the wisdom and prudence, the power and pity, the forbearance and patience, the love and compassion of God toward his church. He exercises the same attributes in the church as in the world, with this only difference, the display is brightest in the first. This is what we call analogy, and from this general source we derive many particular arguments from the nature and fitness of things in defence of our proposition.

First,

First, It is just and right, and agreeable to the nature and fitness of things, that we should *diminish evils and difficulties, which we are not able wholly to remove.* There are in nature a thousand obstacles in the way of every just pursuit. Agriculture, commerce, navigation, literature, government civil and domestick, are all attended with difficulties, some of which threaten the subversion of the whole. It should seem better, at first sight, that no obstacles should exist to discourage such just and laudable pursuits: but they do exist, and we cannot help their existence, yea, perhaps their existence may be necessary to give being and exercise to some of the finest abilities and virtues of mankind.

Our skill, and our duty too, consist neither in wholly removing these evils, for that is not in our power, nor in remaining plaintive and inactive, doing nothing where much may be done, though not all we wish: but in diminishing these ills and in making the most and best of such materials as providence hath actually put into our hands. Every projector of a great design exercises his penetration in foreseeing what obstacles may obstruct the execution of it, and much of his skill lies in providing against them.

We apply this to the case in hand. Christianity is highly fitted, and admirably adapted to the actual state and condition of men and things in this world. It was excellently said by Jesus Christ, *The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath,* implying that positive religion was so contrived as to yield in certain cases to natural and necessary contingencies. The man, who uses all diligence to obtain evidence of believers baptism, and cannot obtain it, and yet desires admission to the Lord's table, throws a difficulty in
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the way of the church, a difficulty, too, which they cannot remove: but, the question is, can they not diminish it? It hath pleased God to give this man faith in Christ and moral obedience; but it does not please him to give him light into adult baptism. He does not belong to the world, he does not desire to trouble the church, he only wishes for a peaceable admission to fellowship; we cannot give him knowledge, we cannot baptize him without it: but we can admit him to the Lord's table and so build God's house with the best materials we have. It is a case of insurmountable difficulty, it cannot be wholly removed: but it may be diminished. This argument is taken from that *analogy* which there evidently is between the œconomy of nature and that of christianity, and, if it be a less evil for an unbaptized believer to be incorporated in the church than to lie exposed in the world, the reasoning is valid.

Secondly, It is fit and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that there should be *no disqualification where there is no crime*. On this principle we argue against a sacramental test in the episcopal church. Christian churches are free states, and full fellowship is the new birthright of every regenerate man. The Candidate for fellowship, who has examined believers baptism by immersion, and cannot obtain evidence of the truth of it, is indeed in a state, in which his knowledge is imperfect: but his imperfection is innocent, because he hath exercised all the ability and virtue he has, and his ignorance is involuntary, yea perhaps he may have exercised ten times more industry and application, though without success, than many others, who have obtained evidence. To deny church-fellowship to persons of genuine

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virtue,

virtue, and of, it may be, superior virtue too, is to affix a disgrace and inflict a punishment both without an offence, and in violation of a right. This is a case of involuntary error, and there is, there can be no moral turpitude in it. Where there is allowed virtue in the general course of a man's actions, and no moral evil in one particular imperfection, it is not imaginable that any punishment should be inflicted, or any benefit of society denied. Now, as we all agree, that Christ hath constituted his church on principles of *equity*, it should seem, this argument is valid and of force.

Thirdly, It is just and right, and agreeable to the nature of things, that *all men should be placed in that condition, in which they can do most good*. By this rule we determine what is usually denominated *a call in providence*, and an all-sufficient rule it is. Now, by excluding the persons in question from church fellowship, we deprive the church of many wise and worthy members, who might become extremely useful, and we deny them the liberty of exercising such abilities as God gave them for the publick edification. If Christ constituted his church on a principle of promoting the greatest *social* good, it should seem, this argument also ought to have its weight.

Fourthly, It is just and right in virtuous communities, that *a visible difference should be put between the righteous and the wicked*. If hatred of sin and love of holiness were principles of constructing the christian church, as they certainly were, this argument too is good. The candidate in question is not rejected on account of any thing in common with the rest of exempts, he is neither an infidel nor an immoral man, yet he is as really excluded as they are. This is a confounding
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ing of characters essentially different, which should seem unwarrantable in a society professedly incorporated for the purpose of separating and distinguishing them. Shall *he that sweareth, and he that feareth an oath*, be held at equal distance from the Lord's table, and all the other benefits of church fellowship!

Fifthly, It would argue *great unfitness in any scheme of religion for this world, if it made no provision for human imperfections*. If a plan of religion provided for the wilful perpetration of vice, it would be a scheme fit for infernal spirits. If it provided only for perfect knowledge and virtue, it would be a plan fit for only angels to realize: but if, while it provided for eminent attainments of knowledge and goodness, it provided also for imperfections, that is, for small and inferior degrees of science and moral excellence, if it provided for increase of knowledge and virtue, though accompanied with much ignorance and weakness, then would it commend itself for a divine system fitted by perfect wisdom and goodness for frail imperfect men. The candidates, for whom we plead, are allowed to possess that general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, from which all knowledge and all good actions proceed: but they have not yet attained those peculiar exercises of it, which produce some particular parts of obedience; however, it seems fit and right, that they should be permitted to perform all they do know; and patiently borne with till they are able to make further progress. If Jesus Christ constituted his church on principles of *patience* and forbearance, condescension and long-suffering, it should seem, this argument also ought to have some authority over us.

From arguments of this sort, and we omit many, which might be adduced, there arises a high probability, that it is just and right for christian churches to admit of free communion.

Were these reasonings on the nature of things alone, and were they unconnected with revelation, and unsupported by it, they would come under the description of general dispositions not regulated by particular directions, and consequently they ought not to be urged in this controversy as decisive in point of right or law: but when we examine the scriptures, and find, that christianity is actually constituted on these principles, that these are adopted as grounds of the divine conduct to us and rules of our actions to one another, we have a right to conclude, that these arguments are fair, valid and conclusive.

We have not hesitated to affirm, that God was the original projector of those associated bodies of men for divine worship, which we call christian churches. We have made no scruple of affirming that the original projector formed these churches on principles of wisdom, equity, compassion, love of holiness, and so on. We have not quoted passages of scripture to prove this, for the point is beyond contradiction, and the quotations would be endless. If these should be accounted only probable arguments, we trust the next will produce demonstration.

Our second class of arguments we take from EXPRESS LAWS OF CHURCH FELLOWSHIP contained in the written revealed will of our excellent legislator.

First, We argue from his *law of exclusion*. There are in the new testament many lists of persons, who may not be admitted into the christian church in this world, and who will be denied an entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Some of these

these lists are general, others descend to particulars : but there is no mention of the persons now before us in any of them. Had the law of exclusion been made by a legislator, who could not pry into futurity, it might be imagined he did not foresee the case, he did not know that such persons would ever appear : but there is no room to urge this, for our lawgiver was a prophet, and a tender prophet, who foresaw all future periods and persons, and forewarned his church of every thing that would endanger the constitution of it.

The natural tendency of every good man is to associate with other good men, and to go with them into the enjoyment of every immunity, that belongs to their society, and his apparent right to enjoy all the comforts as well as to suffer all the crosses of his condition is so highly probable, that nothing less than a clear, positive, express law of exclusion seems necessary to empower any church to refuse his claim. If there be no such law, and none such there is, we cannot help saying to the candidate before us, *Come in thou blessed of the Lord, wherefore standest thou without ?*

Secondly, We argue from his *law of toleration*. The particular case of the persons in question, we allow, is not mentioned in the new testament : but a general law including this, and many more such cases, is published, and answers the end better than the insertion of any particular case could have done. This law is, that all christians should enjoy unmolested IN THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH the right of private judgment. In a multitude of passages in the new testament, the disciples of Christ are exhorted to judge for themselves in all matters of religion and conscience, and this right of self-determination is vindicated not only against magistrates, philosophers and Rabbies, but
against

against fellow-members, as in the xivth of Romans, and even against inspired apostles, as in the 8th and 10th verses of the xxiii^d of Matthew. By this law we are bound to allow an universal toleration in all matters, that do not destroy the essence of gospel worship.

Before we proceed, it will be necessary to explain our meaning, and an answer to three plain questions will sufficiently do so. First, *What* do we plead for? We answer, A free toleration of the right of private judgment. There is in our churches, strictly speaking, no such thing as publick faith; our standard of faith is the holy scripture, and whatever we publish beside are the private sentiments of different men, and different communities; and it is questionable whether any two churches so exactly agree as *bona fide* to constitute an uniformity. Now we plead for the allowance of this right to unbaptized believers. What one of our churches allows to another of our churches, that, we suppose, each church ought to allow to all its own members, and to all good men. Secondly, *Where* do we plead for the free exercise of this right to be tolerated? We answer, Not in the state, that our civil governors allow, but in the church. We do not only affirm, that unbaptized believers have a natural right to freedom in Britain, so that they may congregate, and form churches of their own faith and order: but we affirm, that they have a scriptural right to their own faith and order in our churches. It will be objected, this would destroy our own faith and order. In answer to this, we propose a third question, *How far* is this toleration to extend, and where shall we draw the line? We answer, in general, Toleration ought to extend as far as is consistent with purity of faith and order

order, and of this each church ought to judge for itself.

If we descend to particulars, we must observe, that the objects of toleration are two, errors of faith and irregularities of practice. In regard to faith we must distinguish between the *facts* recorded in scripture, such as the birth, life, miracles, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming, judgment, and universal dominion of Christ, from *reasonings* upon these facts; they are the latter that are the proper objects of toleration. He who denies the facts is an infidel, he does not believe the record God has given of his son, and consequently he is not a disciple of Christ, and so can have no claim to sit at his table. A man, who does believe the facts, but who reasons obliquely upon them, is a believer, and he ought to be tolerated though he is an inconclusive reasoner. The other object of toleration is irregularity of practice. Christian obedience is submission to two sorts of precepts, the one moral, the other positive. The object of toleration in moral obedience is that sort of improper action, which proceeds not from malice, but from infirmity. The object of toleration in positive obedience is that sort of irregularity, which proceeds from innocent mental error. Now this kind of toleration, while it provides for the peace and prosperity of the church, and for the ease of tender consciences, neither destroys the essence of christianity nor the purity of gospel worship.

In effect, we do tolerate in all our churches each of these imperfections. 1. In regard to *faith*. A church believing the mediation of Jesus Christ, which is a fact, admits a believer of this fact to fellowship, although he thinks it was necessary in order to this mediation that the human soul of
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Christ should pre-exist his incarnation. In such a case the church distinguishes between the fact, that Christ is a mediator, which the member believes, and his false reasoning upon the fact, that it was necessary the human soul of Christ should be first created, and that it should exist in heaven before his incarnation, in order to mediate between God and men in behalf of the old testament saints. The same may be said of many other cases. We repeat it again, the clear facts recorded in scripture are not objects of toleration, and a denier of them is an infidel: but errors in reasoning concerning these facts, such as the time and mode of their existence, and so on, are objects of toleration, and of a toleration every way safe to the facts themselves.

2. In regard to the toleration of *moral* irregularities, it is certain we are obliged to make, and do actually make the distinction above mentioned. We exclude members for such immoral actions as proceed from malice, and hatred of virtue: but we never think of expelling any for such immoral actions as proceed from infirmity. For example. *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour*, is a moral law, founded in the nature and fitness of things; and should any member of our churches, with malicious motives, and on purpose to injure another, violate this law, we should expel him as a hater of morality, an enemy to the rights of all mankind, whom he attacked in the one injured person: but if another, without any apparent malice, and merely to gratify a silly infirmity, a love of tattling and chattering, take up a false report rashly, and tell it carelessly to the injury of his brother, we should not expel this man. We should pity him, and pray for him, and exhort him to exercise more
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caution for the future, and, though we knew he had not such an absolute government of his tongue as the law required, yet we should tolerate him, and such a toleration would not in the least endanger the law.

3. In respect to irregularities in *obedience to positive precepts*, we all exercise a toleration of these in an ample manner, except in the one article before us, to which some of us object. Our churches have never yet agreed on the number of positive institutes. All hold two, baptism and the Lord's Supper, some add a third, the Sunday sabbath, others several more, as worshipping God by singing, anointing the sick with oil, abstaining from things strangled and from blood, and so on. We tolerate irregularities in all these cases, and we have instances of pastors, who observe the jewish sabbath, exercising the pastoral office with the highest honour both to the church and themselves in congregations, that profane the jewish sabbath, and hold the Sunday sabbath to be a positive divine institute. Now as all positive institutes proceed from the same legislator, and ought all to be treated with equal reverence, and as we tolerate irregularities in some of them without any danger to the general law of obedience to positive religion, what imaginable good reason can be produced for making an exception in the case of unbaptized believers?

This kind of toleration is professedly treated of in the fourteenth chapter of Romans, and the inspired apostle defends it on the principles, which we have laid down. There is, he affirms, no moral turpitude in mental errors, and the toleration of them is perfectly consistent with the safety of the church, the purity of the faith, and the order of divine worship.

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The believer, who was baptized in his infancy, claims a right to church fellowship; the church judges he has not been baptized, but he judges he has been baptized in his infancy by sprinkling according to Christ's institution. Now this is his own case, it is a case of innocent irregularity in obeying a positive institute, and he ought to be allowed to judge for himself. Here the fort of those, who refuse admission to such members, falls to the ground. They reason thus. All churches require persons to be baptized before they admit them to the Lord's supper; now we deny that infant sprinkling is baptism, we therefore require persons, who have been sprinkled in infancy, to be baptized by immersion. When people reason thus for themselves they reason rightly: but when they reason thus for another person they claim a right of judging for him, and consequently deny him that liberty of self judging, which they themselves exercise under a law, which the common legislator ordained alike for both. We do not then plead for the admission of such a person because we think he hath been baptized, for in our opinion he hath not: but because he judges he has been baptized, and we have no authority to deprive him of the right of private judgment, but on the contrary we are expressly commanded to allow him the liberty of determining for himself.

If any reply, We allow his right of private judgment, and he may join a church of his own sentiments; we answer, That does not alter the case, you are required to allow the exercise of private judgment *in* your own community, not out of it, where your allowance and disallowance operate nothing.

Agreeably

Agreeably to this principle, when I have had the honour to assist in forming a christian church intending to hold mixt communion, I have first embodied the baptists, and they have afterwards admitted believers, who were satisfied with their infant baptism, on the footing of toleration. The whole christian church, in my opinion, was thus *planted in this likeness of Christ's death*, and at the same time the laws of christian liberty and toleration were delivered to them to be made use of as the exigencies of the times should require.

We will conclude this article with two remarks. First, When an unbaptized believer appears before the brethren at a church meeting, and, professing faith and repentance, requires admission into church fellowship, the true question before the church is not Whether he have been baptized, but Whether he may judge for himself? Secondly, No instance can be produced of any apostle presuming to judge for any primitive christian, and making his opinion the ground of that christian's conduct. On the contrary, instances may be produced of an inspired apostle's declaring himself of one opinion on positive institutes, and pleading for the liberty of christians to embrace another. *I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing unclean, to him it is unclean. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.*

Thirdly, Let us attend to *the law of baptism itself* in its original institution. While we pay all due reverence to a divine institute, we ought not to make more of it than the institutor made, neither ought we to remove it from that place in which his wisdom set it. Baptism has been called an *initiating* ordinance, that is, an ordinance by

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which we enter into something. Let us remember, this is not a scriptural definition of baptism, nor is it admissible except in a qualified sense. It certainly was not an ordinance by which the first baptists entered into church fellowship, for into what church did the disciples of John enter by baptism? Was Jesus Christ admitted a member of a christian church by baptism? Or into what church did the Eunuch enter, when Philip alone baptized him in the desert. Believers indeed entered on a publick profession of christianity in general by baptism, and that was all. If some were added to the church immediately after baptism, it may not be amiss to recollect, that it was immediately after a sermon too, and, if this connection of events afforded any argument for the nature and place of baptism, it might as well be applied to the nature and place of a sermon, and preaching might be denominated an initiating ordinance. The truth is, preaching produced conversion, conversion baptism, baptism acquaintance and conversation with church members, and conversation church fellowship. When we receive and use an ordinance for all the ends for which it was instituted, we have done all that is required of us: but when we employ it to other ends, the least that can be said of us is, we are wise above what is written. Zeal may animate us; but even zeal, when it does not follow knowledge, will misguide us.

General and vague as this description of the law of baptism is, it is sufficient for all the ends, for which we produce it; however, it may serve to elucidate our meaning, if we be more explicit.

We affirm, then, that baptism is not a church ordinance, that it is not naturally, necessarily, and actually connected with church fellowship,

ship, and consequently that the doctrine of initiating into the christian church by baptism is a confused association of ideas, derived from masters, whose disciples it is no honour to be.

Baptism, we allow, is a positive institute of the New Testament, and ought to be practised till the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: but, that it is not a New Testament *church* ordinance is clear, for it was administered several years before the Jewish œconomy was dissolved, and consequently before there were any such congregated societies in the world as we call christian churches. When John the Baptist came first preaching and baptizing, Jesus, who afterward founded the christian church, lived a private life at Nazareth; he did not enter on his ministry till the death of John, and he did not dissolve the Jewish ecclesiastical state till his own death. People were baptized all this time on a general profession of faith in the Messiah, and repentance towards God. This notion of baptism was preserved after the resurrection of Christ, and after christian churches had been congregated by his order, as appears by the baptism of the Eunuch, who indeed made a profession of faith; but was not associated to any particular christian church.

Much has been said, in pretended proof of the place of baptism, concerning the order of Christ's words in that commission to baptize, which he gave his apostles; it is recorded in the last chapter of Matthew: but, if this trite method of reasoning amounted to argument, we might form one thus. Christ instituted the Lord's supper before his death. Christ made baptism a positive christian institute after his resurrection. Therefore the Lord's supper ought to be received before we are baptized.

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In a word, the law of christian baptism is, that believers in Christ should publickly avow their faith in him, and their resolution to obey him, by being baptized; and the proper time for this is after believing and before admission to fellowship: however, as there was no original and actual, so there is no natural and necessary connection between baptism and fellowship. Baptism was an initiation into the profession of christianity at large, not into the practice of it in any particular church.

This is the law, and, we think, the whole law of baptism, and we plead this law in favour of the right of unbaptized believers to the Lord's supper, for two plain and obvious reasons. 1. A command to perform one duty is not a prohibition of another duty. *Keep the sabbath-day holy* is one command, and *honour thy father* is another: but, as there is no necessary connection between the two, a breach of the first does not release from an obligation to the last. Baptism and the Lord's supper are both commanded: but a law to perform one does not prohibit the observance of the other: the unbaptized believer's way to the Lord's table is therefore clear. 2. It is remarkable, that this positive law of baptism is not enforced by any penalties, and herein it differs from all other positive institutes. By what right then do we affix to the breach of it such a severe penalty as exclusion from church fellowship? After all, our candidates neither deny the right of Christ to give laws, nor that he hath given the law of baptism, nor that they are bound to obey it; their error lies in an innocent mistake concerning the proper subject, and the right mode of administering it. There is no penalty
affixed

affixed to this mistake, and one law is not a prohibition or repeal of another law.

Fourthly, We argue for the right of our candidates *from the law of gifts*. When Jesus Christ ascended to heaven, he gave gifts unto men for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the general body of christians. To one he gave a discerning of spirits, to another divers kinds of tongues, one had a gift of psalmody, another a doctrine, and another an interpretation, and, when the whole church came together into one place, all these gifts were directed to the publick edification.

It is the opinion of some, that all these spiritual gifts have been continued in the church in some degree ever since, and it is the thankful acknowledgment of all, that a part of them have been perpetuated to this day. Whatever general gifts men receive from God, they receive under a natural obligation of employing and improving them, of improving them for themselves, and employing them for the benefit of others; and whatever special ecclesiastical abilities good men receive from Christ the lord of the church, they receive, both under a general obligation to use them, and under a special scriptural law to employ them in the church for the edification of the body.

Some unbaptized believers have received out of the fulness of Christ spiritual abilities; one hath a gift of psalmody, another a comprehensive knowledge of christian theology, and an aptitude to teach it to others, a third excels in spiritual discernment, and so on; and we have four remarks to make on their case.

1. The want of baptism does not incapacitate these men. The vigour of mental operations is
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not impaired by this defect. Neither fancy, judgment, memory, penetration, freedom of speech, courage, nor any other excellence, that goes into the composition of a spiritual gift, is annihilated or debilitated on that account, so that they are sufficient to the work of edifying the body of Christ.

2. There is no express law in the New Testament, no prohibition against the use of these abilities on account of the imperfection of baptism, no precedent of exclusion, no trace or distant hint of any such thing.

3. There is an express law given to persons, who have spiritual gifts, to make use of them. They are not only *given to every man to profit withal*, but a positive command is issued, that they should employ them in the church for general advantage. Call all these abilities of unbaptized believers *one talent*, if you please, and suppose the baptist brother to have two, it will yet follow, that the one talent should not be hid in a napkin, but put to use, that, when the Lord comes, he may receive his own with improvements.

4. Christian societies cannot regularly employ these gifts among themselves, unless they admit the persons, who have them, to fellowship. An unbaptized believer, having spiritual abilities, would not proceed regularly, if he were to begin by demanding of the church a right to exercise his gifts among them for the publick benefit, according to Christ's command. He should first demand fellowship. In such a case a people would reason justly if they allowed, that such a man had a right to exercise his abilities in the church; that the church was obliged by law to allow and direct the exercise; that they had no jurisdiction except over their own members, and consequently

consequently that right to exercise spiritual gifts included in itself right to church fellowship. The law, that obliges the candidate to exercise his gifts in the church, and the law, that commands the church to employ him and to direct the exercise, both include in themselves an obligation to fellowship: they oblige a candidate to join a church, and they oblige a church to admit him.

All our churches allow and employ neighbouring independent ministers to preach to them, and daily express a high and just regard for their useful labours, yet, in their opinion, these men are unbaptized; now we only ask such a toleration for members of their own congregations, as they daily exercise toward ministers of other congregations, and we urge this for the former, because by their conduct to the latter they prove, that they do not hold the want of baptism to be either a natural or a legal incapacity.

Fifthly, Let us advert to the *law of constitution*. When the compassion of Christ induced him to descend into Judea to recover a profligate world to order, he brought along with him three sorts of excellencies, a body of perfect wisdom, an assortment of holy affections, and a set of upright actions. Some degree of each of these he imparted to his disciples, and they to others, as assisted by his divine influence. All believers, therefore, have a threefold union to Christ; an union of sentiment, for they believe what he believed and taught; an union of affection, for they love and hate what he loved and hated, what gave him pleasure gives them pleasure, and what grieved him gives them pain; and an union of practice, for they form their lives on his exam-
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ple. Hence arises an union to one another, as well as an union of all to Christ the head.

It is not imaginable, that any of the disciples of Christ possess these excellencies in such perfection as he possessed them, nor is it to be supposed, that all possess them in such eminent degrees as some do, however, there is a general excellence, a supreme love to truth and virtue, *religious principle*, if you will, in all believers, on which the christian church is constituted.

All the laws of constituting new testament churches are formed on this just notion of sacred social union, and our argument turns on the sufficiency of this *general excellence*, which is common to all believers, for all the ends and purposes of church fellowship.

The kingdom of Christ is an empire of truth and virtue, and it is not necessary to a residence in this kingdom that men should be perfect in either. A supreme love to truth as far as we know it, and a conscientious attachment to virtue as far as we have discovered it, are high qualifications, and all-sufficient for the duties and enjoyments of church communion. Now these are always found in the persons, for whose right we are pleading. They are partakers of God's promise in Christ by the gospel, they have heard the word of truth, the gospel of their salvation, the eyes of their understandings are enlightened, they know the hope of his calling, and the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, they have been quickened together with Christ, and are made nigh by his blood, they have access by one spirit unto the Father, and therefore they ought not to be accounted any more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and of the household of God, and to be built upon the foundation
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of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone.

Persons thus qualified are equal to every duty of church fellowship, to singing, prayer, hearing and even preaching the word, receiving the Lord's supper, visiting the sick, relieving the poor, in a word, to all the duties men owe as church members to themselves, to one another, and to God.

They, who answer such descriptions, are so very like the primitive christians, that, it must be allowed, the inducement to receive them into church fellowship is exceedingly strong, so strong, that nothing short of an express prohibition seems sufficient to their exclusion.

Here is one article, it will be said, in which these believers do not answer the description of the primitive christians, they have not been baptized by immersion: but, let it be observed, that baptism strictly speaking is neither repentance towards God, nor faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, it is only a *profession* of these graces, and church fellowship seems in the very nature of the thing to be connected with the *graces*, and neither with this, nor with any other peculiar mode of professing them. We are sure, the church triumphant is formed on a connection between grace and glory, a profession of grace sometimes accompanying the connection and sometimes not, and we are taught to pray, *thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*

Right to church fellowship either lies in grace alone, or in baptism alone, or in both united, or in something beyond them all. If it lie in grace alone, then faith in Christ and moral obedience have a merit in them, and church fellowship is a reward due to such merit. A humble christian will not allow this. If it lie in baptism alone,

then an irreligious person may get himself baptized, and claim his right to church communion. If it lie in grace and baptism united, then a worse idea of merit than the former will return, for then it will follow, that baptism gives grace its value : but this is inadmissible. The truth is, right to church communion lies in that royal charter, which the clemency of God hath granted to mankind, and by which persons of certain descriptions, though imperfect in knowledge, defective in obedience, and incompassed with many infirmities, are allowed the favour of approaching him through the merit of Jesus Christ. Title to fellowship lies in the divine charter, meetness for it in personal qualification.

This qualification, which I call *grace, general excellence, religious principle, supreme love to truth and virtue*, perfect in kind, imperfect in degree, is essential to church fellowship, and the law of Christ is, that his churches should be constituted of only such persons as actually possess this real sterling goodness, which, being sufficient to answer all the ends for which churches are constituted, ought always to be considered as a clear warrant to admit to fellowship. Of such persons the primitive churches were constituted, and nothing can be clearer, than the divine testimony, that against such as these, who bring forth the spiritual fruits of *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance*, against such there is no law.

Finally, We urge in behalf of our candidates the law of *release and deprivation*. We put these two together, because release from duty includes in it a deprivation of benefits. Jesus Christ found mankind in slavery, his gospel finds a sinner in that condition still : but he both manumits and enfranchises

enfranchises this slave, he frees him from bondage and invests him with privileges and immunities. This is done in the moment of regeneration, and henceforward this man ceases to be a servant of men in religious matters. He ceases to be his own, he becomes a subject of him, who died and rose again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living. The highest authority binds him to duty, and endows him with privilege, and none but the highest authority can deprive him of one, or release him from the other. This undeniable fact is full to our purpose.

This argument is taken from that obligation, under which the legislator hath laid every good man, to perform the *moral* as well as the positive duties of church fellowship, and from which obligation neither their own imperfections, nor any church acts of ours, can or ought to discharge them. If we refuse to admit the believers in question into church fellowship, they owe us none of the *moral* duties, which belong to *that* condition, and it would be unreasonable in us to require them. When they build places of worship, support ministers, use hospitality, provide utensils for the celebration of ordinances, contribute toward maintaining the poor, and relieving the sick members of the church, they do nothing but their duty, if they themselves be members: but, if they be denied the benefit of membership, all these are works of supererogation. Now we argue, that God hath connected in the holy scriptures duty with benefit, and that, having enjoined the duties on all believers, he intended all believers should reap the benefit of performing them. The Lord's supper is both a duty and a benefit; Christ requires all his disciples to partake of the Lord's supper, but, if we deny them
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the benefit, we discharge them from the duty ; and the same may be said of all other church duties and benefits. Now, as we pretend to no authority to release from duty, how is it possible we should claim an authority to deprive of benefit?

Many of these duties are moral duties, of natural and immutable obligation, and such is the absolute necessity of obedience to them, that, when a man is so circumstanced as to be obliged either to omit a moral duty or a positive precept, the latter is in all cases to give way to the former. If obedience to positive precepts must subside to make room for obedience to moral precepts, how is it possible to conceive, that innocent ignorance of a *positive* precept should become a release from *moral* obligations, and such are many of the duties of church fellowship.

Waiving for the present a multitude of arguments fairly and honestly deducible from scripture source, such as *the law of positive institutes*, and others, the sum of what we have said from the oracles of God is this. God, a being possessed of all possible perfections, is the author of christianity, the founder and friend of the christian church. He displayed the magnificence of his perfections in framing the whole, and continues to display it in governing every part. The same attributes, that pervade and direct all his natural empire, constitute and guide his moral dominion in the church. His wisdom leaves difficulties and obstacles, to us as immoveable as the decrees of fate : but he leaves them to excite and improve our mental abilities and moral excellencies, which he intends we should employ in diminishing them. His perfect justice never disqualifies without a crime. His benevolence produces the greatest social good. His love of holiness

holiness distinguishes the righteous from the wicked, and his patience and compassion bear with imperfections, both of knowledge and virtue: hence we have inferred, that the admitting of an unbaptized believer to church fellowship is, ON THE PRINCIPLES OF CHRISTIANITY, a wise, a just, a benevolent, a holy, a humane action.

We have gone further, we have examined many EXPRESS LAWS, given in writing by Jesus Christ to his church for the more easy administration of justice in it. There are laws of exclusion: but unbaptized believers are not in the list. There are laws of toleration, which actually include their case. There is a law of baptism: but this does not repeal any other law, nor prohibit the observance of any other positive institute. There is a law for the exercise of gifts, in which the incorporation of some is included, and there is the law of constitution, which authorizes the incorporation of all good men. We have examined, finally, the law of release and deprivation, and we have thence inferred that the interests of morality, and the pleasures of christianity, if not diminished by excluding these persons, would, however, be greatly promoted by admitting them. We do not presume to have exhausted the subject, there remain many more reasons for the practice, which we have been defending: but these are satisfactory to us, and, we think, they deserve consideration by our brethren; however, the writer of this does not mean to lengthen out the controversy, and, he hopes, should any think proper to deny all he has affirmed, no offence will be taken at his future silence. He would not seem to slight the admonitions of any good man: but, on this article, his judgment is settled, he has only to add, *Grace be with all them, that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity!*

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CONCLUSION.

We will, then, close this subject with a few remarks once for all. Impartial justice obliges us to declare, that all our congregations, whether they tolerate infant baptism in their own communities or not, are warm friends to civil and religious liberty, and to universal toleration in a *state*. Even in popery, that worst of all pretended christianity, they distinguish the religion from the civil polity incorporated with it, and would tolerate the former while they execrate the latter as men and as Britons.

An apology, too, ought to be made for their refusing to tolerate infant baptism in their own churches. Sprinkling is so different from dipping, the incorporating of infants by sprinkling into the christian church is so incompatible with the nature of a rational religion to be received and professed on a conviction of the truth and excellence of it; the New Testament is so utterly unacquainted with infant sprinkling, the arguments brought to support it are so weak and far-fetched, the concessions of learned divines are so numerous, and the mischiefs attending it so notorious, that they may well be excused for their aversion to it.

Again, Christ's right of legislation is so clear, the perfection of the scriptures so fully ascertained, the dipping of adults on their own personal profession of faith and repentance so plain, the honour put upon this institution by the example of Jesus Christ so conspicuous, the pleasure enjoyed by large congregations in hearing persons profess faith and repentance so refined, and the heart-felt satisfaction of conscientiously administering and receiving this ordinance so invigorating,

rating, heightened too by a consciousness of disinterested motives capable of suffering the cross and despising the shame of popular ridicule and censure, all these are so forcible, that we must not be too severe on the men, who, in the transports of their zeal, considering themselves as the only defenders of this part of primitive religion, hold infant-sprinkling in abhorrence, and refuse to tolerate it in their churches.

Further, The whole denomination has, through successive ages, been misrepresented, and treated with more partiality and rigour than any other nonconformists. They were generally nicknamed *Anabaptists*, or people who baptized twice, because they baptized some people once, who had been sprinkled in infancy, which sprinkling in their opinion was no baptism at all. Orthodox writers against heresy always took care to put Anabaptists into the list of most pestilent hereticks, because they exploded that impenetrable jargon, which the schools had incorporated with christianity. Writers on church government abused them as fomentors of anarchy, enemies to monarchy, and abettors of republicanism, because they detested despotism, and denied the authority of civil magistrates over conscience in matters of religion. Ecclesiastical historians affirmed, they were atheists, antinomians and libertines, because they thought universal toleration in a state a necessary part of sound civil polity. The literati slandered them as an ignorant illiterate crew, because they constantly affirmed, that the New Testament was a book so plain, and the religion of it so easy, that any man of common sense might understand it, if he would. Priests calumniated them as an uncandid, sour, malignant, implacable sect, because they thought christianity unchange-

able, and compliance and compliments crimes in religion. The gay world called them morose and unfociable, and laughed at their want of taste for ryhmes, and novels, and plays, and places of fashionable dissipation, and every coquet exclaimed, Come into the world without christening, and go out of it without burying! Lord have mercy upon an Anabaptist's soul! Do we wonder that such men refuse to tolerate infant sprinkling?

Moreover, they have been distinguished from all other protestants as men the least deserving of equity or pity, and that by protestants too, from whom better treatment might have been expected. Even Cranmer thought it no crime to burn an anabaptist woman, and his bloody example was imitated both by Q. Elizabeth and K. James I. Some of this denomination were the last, that were burnt for religion, and since they were allowed to die in their beds, their corpses were denied the right of what is called christian burial.

Even good men, men, who in all other respects behaved with the dignity of men, and the delicacy of Christians, frequently caught the fashionable ton, and treated this denomination with an insolence truly provoking. They suffered themselves, against the just and humane feelings of their own good hearts, to be made the dupes of interested leaders, who were blinded with prejudice, bloated with pride, and void of every principle except love of self. Let us cease to wonder then, that some baptists treat infant sprinkling with peculiar dislike, and refuse to put it among the errors, that may be tolerated in their communities. It is an excess: but it is an excess of virtue, and excessive virtue is the most pardonable of all vices.

After

After all, an extreme aversion to one particular error may have arisen from an innocent *association of ideas*, which have no natural, no necessary, nor scriptural connection. *Initiation* into church communion and *baptism* are not always connected together in scripture: but they have always appeared in company in the church of Rome, so the reformers found them, and so they kept them in the churches, which they framed, and perhaps we may have derived them from thence, if so, the sooner we dissociate these two ideas the better. In this case, the ordinance would be placed in our churches precisely in that state, in which it was originally fixed. Sometimes it would be connected with church-fellowship, at other times it would not: but at all times it would be primitive publick profession of faith in Christ, highly honourable to him, who made it.

Again, It is not impossible, that *strict communion* and *modesty* may have associated themselves in the minds of some. A modest minister of this opinion, in close connection with others of the same opinion, may look with too much reverence on his fathers and brethren, and think it would be arrogant in him to introduce what would appear to them, he fears, a mark of folly and rashness. A needless blush this among the most placid and friendly of mankind!

Perhaps, also, *mixt communion* and *licentiousness* may have been associated by some, because they have observed some particular cases, in which it has not been conducted with wisdom and prudence: but we should distinguish the use of every thing from the abuse of it.

Further, Perhaps *toleration of sprinkling* and *want of zeal* for primitive baptism may have been associated in the minds of some: but this connec-

tion is not just, for they, who practise free communion, have discovered as much zeal for the ordinance as their brethren of the contrary opinion.

Probably, *mixt fellowship* and *great majorities* of unbaptized believers, tending to alter the constitution of a church, may have been associated ideas: but, whatever may have happened in some few particular cases, the connection is not good, for in most mixt churches, where the minister is a Baptist, the proportion is not so great as five to a hundred.

I sometimes imagine, I see a pastor of a strict church, consisting of two hundred members, sitting in his chair at a church-meeting, his members all present. I fancy, I see a venerable, gray headed old gentleman rise, and hear him inform the church, that five gentlemen, and five ladies, now in an adjoining room, desired to be admitted into the assembly to make a profession of their faith in Christ, and repentance toward God, and to *declare in the gates of Sion what the Lord had done for their souls*, in order to their admission to fellowship, adding, that they resided in the neighbourhood, constantly attended divine worship in that place, and were well known to have undoubted piety and unspotted morality. They held, indeed, infant sprinkling for christian baptism, however, that was no obstacle to him, and he proposed them as members fit to be tolerated in a new testament church, their names were John Calvin, the reformer, William Tindall, the translator of the bible, John Owen, vice-chancellor of the learned university of Oxford, Matthew Henry, the expositor, and Isaac Watts, the composer of the psalms and hymns on the table. The ladies were Thecla the writer of the Alexandrian manuscript,

manuscript, Mary, Countess Dowager of Warwick, Lady Mary Vere, Lady Mary Armyne, and Mrs Margaret Baxter, whose praises were in all the churches . . . The old man moves that they be admitted, and sits down. I fancy a solemn silence ensues . . . the feelings of the heart rebel against opinion . . . I imagine, I see in the lower seats tears of gratitude flow from the eyes of industrious labourers employed, widows and orphans fed and clothed, and youths educated by the christian liberality of some of the ladies. In nearer pews stern justice sits voting in the features of fathers grown wise by the labours of others of the candidates . . . The junior members smile affection at the name of Watts, and their parents melt at the sight, venerating a man, who allured their much-loved offspring out of the world into the principles of religion, and so into the church . . . The seven venerable deacons, just at the grave, to them the gate of heaven, catch the fire of a holy ambition to enjoy the great accession of knowledge and virtue, that knocks at their door for admission! . . . their souls are in their countenances, they are ready to break the silence with "*Lord! now lettest thou thy servants depart in peace, our eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to lighten the gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.* And you . . . Pastor of the church . . . you . . . who are both a *guide of the blind, and a teacher of babes* . . . what will you do? Rise from your seat . . . Stand up, and *shew your people the way of salvation, collect the votes of justice, gratitude and love, open the gates, that the righteous nation, which keepeth the truth, may enter in.* Were the apostle Peter in your place, he would say, *God hath shewn me, that I should not call any*
man

man common or unclean. Of a truth, I perceive, God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted with him. Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he gave us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, what am I that I should withstand God? Yea, were the chief shepherd and bishop of souls there, would not the goodness of his heart expand his arms, and distil from his lips in accents melodious as these, Come, ye blessed of my father, inherit a kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was a stranger, and ye took me in?

The heart in some cases is a good casuist; and will teach us many things worth our attention. The experience of every christian minister teaches him, that the increase of Christ's visible kingdom is the most desirable of all events, it is the end of all his labours and wishes, consequently his own feelings will urge him to render an admission to church fellowship as easy and accessible to genuine christians as in truth and conscience he can; conscience I say, not merely his own, for, while he provides for the peace of that, he should take care he does not offer violence to that of his brother.

Many pious persons have found, by their own experience, that there are several difficulties to surmount in joining a christian church, obstacles in themselves, obstacles in their worldly connections, and obstacles thrown in their way by the tempter; now what encouragement have this excellent class of men to surmount all these obstacles, if, after all, they cannot be admitted into a christian church, not indeed on account of any positive sin laid to their charge, but because they are supposed to possess a less degree of knowledge than the rest of their brethren?

The

The particular experience of enlarged and liberal minds seems to assort so well with the temper and disposition of Jesus Christ, and to be attended with so many beneficial consequences to the church, that it may justly occasion a doubt, at least, whether prejudice and temper may not have mixed with piety and benevolence, and abated the vigorous exertion of them in the investigation of this question.

Universal experience may serve to convince us, that the christian church, struggling against principalities, and powers, and wicked geniusses in high places, in one common cause for truth and virtue against error and vice, ought to collect all its force, that it may repel the general foe.

We want only the will to excel all other reformed churches, the power is in our hands. In this view we congratulate our brethren on the innumerable blessings, which as Britons and christians they enjoy. One of the chief is that of free religious controversy, by which we lead one another into the truth. The book of divine revelation lies open to us, and on this account our condition is better than that of the pagans. Liberty of reading that, and all other books, is also ours, and so we are in a state better than that of the Spaniards and Portugeze, who are obliged to purchase from the holy office a licence to read all books. The French, who have the scriptures, and who, consequently, if they read, must judge of their meaning, are not allowed to act on any principles of their own different from such as are established by law: but this is not our case. We are not even obliged to procure an *imprimatur*, as our ancestors were: but we may read, we may reason, we may lay down principles, draw conclusions, make our conclusions grounds of action, both

both act on them ourselves and persuade others by preaching and printing to do so too.

This noble constitutional right, like every other gift of providence, may be a blessing, and it may not. If, on the one hand, men, who may be so free, choose to live in slavery, and to wear the fetters of prejudice and custom rather than give themselves the trouble of knocking off their chains, beside losing all the pleasure of conscious rectitude here, assuredly they will hereafter meet with the reproach of the *slotful and wicked servant*, mentioned in the gospel, who did not use his Lord's talent. If, on the contrary, we pervert this liberty into licentiousness, and gratify the violent passions of a depraved heart under colour of searching for truth, and defending it when found, we turn our blessing into a curse. May we be kept from both these extremes, and *may the Lord direct our hearts into the love of God, and into a patient waiting for Christ, who, when he cometh, will tell us all things!*

F I N I S.



